



Ralph Martindale & Co. Ltd. The Chillington Tool Co. Ltd.

HISTORICAL SYNERGY BETWEEN MARTINDALE AND CHILLINGTON

CHILLINGTON

Chillington is a small village a few miles outside Wolverhampton and the nearby Chillington Hall is the ancestral home of the Giffard family who came from France during the 11th Century.

Around 1850 an Iron Works was established in Wolverhampton and the first owner married into the Giffard family. As a result the company was named The Chillington Iron Company. The site covered approximately seventeen acres and included coal mining amongst its activities. The coal and iron trades of the “Black Country” and the various manufacturers arising therefrom established its wealth and prominence in the industrial world. In the early part of the 18th Century, when coal came to be used in the manufacture of iron, the two great industries became united.

In the late 19th Century the Chillington Iron Works came under severe competition from steel as opposed to wrought iron. In order to integrate the use of iron the Company established forging departments making horseshoes and edge tools.

In 1885 the company recruited Mr J. W. Hunt, a manager previously employed by an edge tool manufacturer, to take over these two sections. However, a local steel company had gained complete control of The Chillington Iron Works and decided to close it down. Mr. Hunt persuaded the steel company to sell him the buildings associated with the manufacture of horseshoes and edge tools and in 1892 a limited company was formed known as The Chillington Tool Company Limited. The “Crocodile” trademark was first registered in 1901 and it soon became associated with hoes of the highest quality.

There were fifteen hoe makers and their strikers, and six horseshoe makers and strikers out of a total workforce of around seventy, including the óYoung Governorô, Mr Hunt, who ódid a bit of everythingô.

Although the horseshoe trade was thriving it became increasingly more difficult to find labour prepared to undertake the hard work of making horseshoes on the anvil. The blacksmiths also forged the hoes by making the eye by hand on the anvil and hammering the blade under a tilt hammer.

At the beginning of the 20th Century pneumatic hammers replaced the tilt hammers and drop stamping machines were introduced to forge the eye. The process of making hoes became mechanised and the business made rapid strides.

The Chillington hoe was based on the design of tools that were already in existence in small quantities in the tropical countries of the world and these designs remain to this day but differ substantially from country to country. Although over the years rationalisation has taken place, Chillington still manufacture about fifty different patterns and sizes.

Mr John William Hunt died in 1925 at the age of 81 having served the company for 40 years. By the time of his death The Chillington Tool Company employed over 800 personnel but sales were exclusively made to South America, with Brazil being the largest market. In 1926 the Company was the largest manufacturer of hoes in the world, but in the same year the Brazilian economy collapsed and the rural farmers simply had no money to purchase imported hoes. The Company switched its attention to Africa and South East Asia, including Philippines, Indonesia, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Malaya (now Malaysia), Thailand, and Burma (now Myanmar), and the óChillingtonô óCrocodileô trade marks and names have been registered in South East Asia for almost one hundred years.

During the 1930s substantial trade was built up in East Africa and Chillington introduced a new method of hoe production in the form of a series of press and rolling operations. Also at this time they diversified and manufactured other products including machetes.

Chillington acquired the long established local hoe businesses of Edward Elwell Ltd. in 1929, A. W. Wills & Son Ltd. in 1931 and John Yates & Co. Ltd. in 1933.

In 1935 a Brazilian hoe company, known as Tupy S.A., was purchased to regain lost markets in that country.

During the Second World War hoe production virtually ceased at the factory and it was commandeered to produce aircraft manifolds, firemen's axes, entrenching tools and fire hydrant keys.

After the War the demand for Chillington hoes was far in excess of production capacity and markets had to be put on allocation. During the period 1947 to 1953 an additional three production lines were installed and output reached almost 6 million hoes per year.

The post war years saw much in the way of political change and some of the Chillington markets became influenced by new independent governments who were anxious to establish local industry.

In 1961 Chillington became involved with a joint manufacturing venture in Colombia. This became necessary in view of the policy to encourage local industry in substitution for imports. At that time the market was in excess of 300,000 hoes per year. A factory was established and Chillington provided the plant and expertise. Chillington were only minority shareholders and the investment was eventually sold.

In 1963 Chillington established, as majority shareholders, a factory in Uganda. Plant and equipment was transferred from Wolverhampton and by the late 1960s production had reached 1.6 million hoes per year. The Company also made machetes. However, in 1972 the Company was expropriated by the government of General Idi Amin. Production began to fall and eventually the factory closed.

In 1966 the Board of Investment in Thailand assisted Chillington to establish a factory in Bangkok. In 1968 all imports of hoes were stopped. The Company today still supplies the major part of Thailand's requirements of around two million hoes per year, and exports to neighbouring South East Asian countries, to Europe, to Africa, and to Australasia – in total, to an average of over fifty different countries throughout the world per annum.

In the 1980s Chillington established local manufacture of hoes in Rwanda and Malawi. However, the political instability in both countries eventually led to their demise and both factories are now closed.

The establishment of these overseas factories and the high cost of manufacture in the U.K. obviously had an adverse effect on Chillington in Wolverhampton which closed down in 1989.

Most of the hoes produced throughout the long history of Chillington up to the present day are 'Crocodile' brand but many hoes are still sold under the 'Double Head' brand of Elwell, the 'Hand' brand of Wills and the 'Elephant' and 'Bull' brands of Yates.

Our Chillington 'Crocodile' trademark on hoes is probably the most copied and counterfeited mark in the world in our field of business, as manufacturers of spurious tools attempt to pass off their inferior products as genuine 'Chillington'.

RALPH MARTINDALE GROUP

In 1869 just 14 miles from Chillington, in Aston, a gentleman named Ralph Martindale bought a business called H. Chavasse & Co., iron and steel merchants and manufacturers of swords and machetes. Like the Giffards the Chavasse family originated in France and came to England during the 16th Century. The Chavasse family had originally manufactured swords. However, the business was no longer viable and the transition to machetes began during the 19th Century. Ralph Martindale and Company Limited was incorporated in 1874.

Machetes evolved from swords, and swords, like hoes, were originally made from iron. Steel, an alloy of iron and other elements, was introduced in the early 1700s. At the beginning of the 19th Century the quality of steel improved due to developments in this country which, by 1850, enabled England to take the lead in the world production of iron and steel.

Ralph Martindale & Co. Ltd. diversified and started manufacturing hoes, marked 'Spider and Web', around 1876. However, strong competition from Chillington meant the business concentrated on the production of machetes which has always been the most important product.

The 'Crocodile' trademark used on machetes was first registered in 1876 and in 1912 a co-existence agreement between Chillington and Ralph Martindale was signed. It was agreed that the Chillington mark could not be used on machetes and the Ralph Martindale mark could not be used on hoes.

In 1920 the Company acquired Robert Mole & Sons. This company had a similar history to Martindales. Their 'Steamer' trademark was first registered in 1886.

Machetes, like hoes, were originally made by blacksmiths using tilt hammers and forging the blades on anvils. In 1922, Ralph Martindale engaged an engineer, Mr. S. H. Cope. He mechanised many operations previously done by hand and laid the foundations for the specialised manufacture of machetes, based on high quality, so that the Crocodile brand became market leader, which it remains today. He was appointed to the Board in 1925 and in 1927 was made Managing Director. He died in 1938.

In many parts of the world machete and hoe are synonymous with the Crocodile brand. Over the years Martindale have manufactured about 1,500 different patterns and sizes of machete and have sold to 142 sovereign countries around the world.

Like our Chillington company, our Martindale Crocodile trademark on machetes is also probably the most copied and counterfeited mark in the world in our field of business, as manufacturers of spurious tools attempt to pass off their inferior products as genuine Martindale Crocodile.

During the Second World War millions of machetes were supplied to the Armed Forces and were included in the equipment of tanks, armoured personnel carriers etc. We have been told that on night patrols, British African troops preferred machetes to bayonets.

In 1956 Martindales acquired the long established businesses of J. J. Beale & Co., followed by S. & J. Kitchin & Co. and Plantation Tools in 1957.

Martindales followed the same path as Chillington, switching its attention from South America to Africa and the Far East.

In 1964 a joint venture with the United African Company (UAC), a member of the Unilever Group, established a factory in Nigeria. The plant was shipped from Birmingham and production began in 1965. Despite a civil war in 1967 and continuing political problems, Crocodile Matchets (Nigeria) Limited remains successful and, after recent restructuring, still trades today.

In 1968 a similar joint venture company known as Crocodile Matchets (Ghana) Limited was established in Ghana. Today, this is the single largest machete manufacturer in the world.

Subsequently UAC disposed of their interest of 40% in Nigeria and 50% in Ghana to indigenous shareholders. Martindale acquired some of those shares, and remains the majority shareholder in both the Nigerian and the Ghanaian companies.

In 1979 a design engineer, Mr. P. A. Hartley, was appointed to develop a Steel Mill to roll the Group's special machete sections. A plot of land was acquired in Willenhall, just one mile from the original Chillington site in Wolverhampton. The Steel Mill went through continual development with state of the art technology, and became one of the most modern of its type in Europe. For many years it supplied bespoke steel sections to all Martindale Group companies. However, in common with too many UK steel companies, costs of production in England and competition from steel makers in China and India forced Martindale to close the Steel Mill in 2015, and move to other sources for its steel requirements.

In 1997 a machete manufacturing company was established in Ivory Coast known as Machettes Crocodile (Côte d'Ivoire) S.A., a wholly owned subsidiary. This company was restructured in 2012, and sales through it are targeted at the Francophone West African countries.

ACQUISITION OF CHILLINGTON

In 1997 Plantation and General plc, the parent company of Chillington, decided to sell the last remaining hoe factory in Thailand together with a completely refurbished production line stored in England.

The Board of Ralph Martindale & Co. Ltd. decided to acquire these assets and in particular the 'Crocodile' trademark used on hoes.

Since the acquisition in May 1998, Ralph Martindale have installed the additional hoe production line in Thailand, refurbished the existing plant, and doubled the factory capacity to 4 million hoes per year. Martindale also installed machete making plant and equipment in the new Chillington Thailand factory premises in Bangpoo Industrial Estate, Bangkok, and added the production of machetes and oil palm sickles to its portfolio from Thailand

Moreover, the common markets between the two companies has enabled both businesses to prosper and increase sales of hoes and machetes.

There is a story that the most important things in life for a subsistence farmer in rural economies are his wife, his trousers and his "Crocodile" machete and hoe.

We believe this is still true.